Teti's Girl

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Teti's Girl

by gothiquemars

Summary

(ALTERNATE UNIVERSE)
When Hannibal is called to consult on the Minnesota Shrike case, he does not expect to fall in love with a bright-eyed little girl whom immediately becomes the center of his universe. Despite never feeling compelled towards parenthood, Hannibal instantly understands what it feels like to be paternal. . .and honestly? Obsessively protective.
A.K.A. Nobody is hurting Hannibal's little princess.

Introduction

Hi all!

This is more or less just an explanation of the AU, sorry to get your hopes up LMAO.
Before I explain, ideas for future chapters are welcome! Kudos are appreciated!
I will try to respond to every comment and do all of your ideas (within reason.. SIDE EYE).

This fanfic will not be tied down to a chronological timeline, this is just a collection of one-shots.
The first 1-2 chapters will be chronological, simply to explain the backstory, but the rest will most likely be one-shots that jump back and forward in the timeline.

That being said, here's the explanation:

-Will Graham decides that adults are too much for him, and instead gets work as an elementary school teacher (children are much more tolerable, and they do not have ulterior motives; they will call you fat, and then do a cartwheel, then run away).

-Hannibal is called to consult for cases occasionally due to his high-regard as a psychiatrist.

-Abigail is younger in this AU, about 5 or 6.

-Yes, that means that Garrett Jacob Hobbs is killing children.

-He will die soon anyway, so who cares.

-Alana is Hannibal's friend and she is in an already-established relationship with Margot because I said so. (Lesbians RISE!!)

-That's pretty much it. A lot of the characters stay the same as they are in the show, except for Will being a teacher and Abigail being younger.

ENJOY!! :)

Plain, but pretty.

Chapter Notes

I HOPE YOU ALL ENJOY!
Feel free to give ideas below for future chapters :)

Hannibal knew he was a man with incredible self-control.

Based on the years and years of his life he dedicated to his craft, both psychiatry and 'art', he has learned that he is well capable of having full control over every detail of his life, and everyone else's lives around him. He practically revels in the knowledge that others' fates and trust are bestowed upon him, like on a silver-lined platter. Trust always makes a dish much, *much* sweeter.

Control gives him a sense of reassurance; he will always be multiple steps ahead of every person, no matter what.

However, when he had dialled the number of Garrett Jacob Hobbs (according to his resignation letter), Hannibal had felt as if he had momentarily lost any prospect of control. It was a terrifying concept, losing one's control, after having such an iron-grip, white-knuckled hold on it for so, so long.

"Doctor Lecter."

"Jack, what a surprise." Hannibal smiles politely, opening his office door and standing to the side. "Please, come in."

It was not *exactly* a surprise, considering Hannibal could smell Jack before he had even entered the room; the scent of burned coffee, the almost musty smell of old papers, the faint pang of disease (possibly from corpses), and the slight tang of stress and tension. All thinly veiled by a mass-produced body spray.

"It has been quite some time." Jack begins, striding into Hannibal's office and glancing around at the furniture; no doubt, he was trying to buy time in order to think about how he could explain his *real* reasoning for being here.

"So it has. . .I do hope you have not came in inquiry for an appointment?" He speaks slowly, watching as Jack turns and catches his eye. After a moment, both of them smile and understand the joke.

"One day, Doctor Lecter, but not today. I come about a new case. . . I suppose you are not familiar with a serial killer called 'The Minnesota Shrike'?"

How could he not? It had not been a week since he had impaled Cassie Boyle on a stag head and removed her lungs whilst she was still breathing. Cassie's personal info had been a resident in Hannibal's rolodex for quite some time, due to her blatant ignorance; he had came into contact with her whilst she was smoking outside of a store. Considering that it had been a bright day, Hannibal was in the outdoor seating of a restaurant that he was quite fond of. Cassie had blatantly blew her smoke into Hannibal's face, despite the ticked-off glances he was giving her; apparently, she had found his discontentment amusing.

When Hannibal had heard of the Minnesota Shrike, he knew that Cassie Boyle was the *perfect* way to display how much better he was than Garrett Jacob Hobbs. For poetic justice, Hannibal removed her lungs; she did not need them anymore.

"I believe I have heard tell of 'The Minnesota Shrike' through Tattlecrime. A guilty pleasure of mine." Hannibal smiles indulgently. Not only were Freddie Lounds' articles informative for other killers' work, he also enjoyed seeing the articles about his own crimes.

"Then you have heard correctly, Doctor Lecter. We have seven girls that have been found dead. All the same age, hair colour, weight, give or take."

"Please, call me Hannibal."

"Well, Hannibal," Jack lets out a small laugh, now resting his weight on one foot as he considers how to speak his next words. "I would like your help on the case. I need some fresh eyes, and I think if you could consult, it could really save some innocent children's lives."

Hannibal should have known this would come eventually. He was an expert at his job, even mentoring Alana Bloom, another employee of the FBI.

As Hannibal pretends to consider the offer, he makes his way to his desk and opens his journal full of dates. "Well, I do not see why I cannot. . . however, I do have many patients, so I cannot guarantee that my time will be flexible."

As if this were an issue for Hannibal. Besides from his psychiatry practise being an exclusive way to deal with the area's most troubled minds, he would easily dispose of them at the prospect of having one foot in the doors of the FBI; to see his own murders from the perspectives of Jack Crawford and many others.

"Of course. I only ask that you find the time to come to my office, take a look at the case file, give me your thoughts, and perhaps come to a crime scene or two- *if* there are any more crime scenes in the future, which-" Jack grimaces, giving a halfhearted shrug. "-is very likely. . . The Minnesota Shrike is on a roll. He is killing children left, right, and center."

"I see." Hannibal muses, allowing himself to pause; he enjoyed the idea of leaving Jack hanging for a few moments. "And you are certain that you do not need therapy?" He jokes.

"An appealing offer, but no." Jack chuckles.

"Well then." Hannibal looks to his journal again, just to scan over a randomized page with a sketch he had done whilst talking to a patient of his, Franklyn Froideveaux. "I can find the

time to consult on your case."

"Great." Jack visibly perks up, pleased that he had won Hannibal over. "I will be contacting you, then."

"Of course. Let me write down my personal number for you." Hannibal skims his hand over the scalpel he leaves on his desk, retrieving a pen to jot down his number in neat script, now approaching Jack to hand it over.

"Why thank you." Jack holds up the paper with gusto, now using his spare hand to pat Hannibal's shoulder. "You're going to save some lives, Hannibal."

Hannibal briefly wants to tell Jack that he is crumpling his perfectly-pressed suit jacket, but decides better. He smiles indulgently at Jack, who returns the kind sentiment. Hannibal isn't quite sure if he will be saving many lives, however. . .

Perhaps ending some, would be a better description.

It does not take long for Jack to invite Hannibal to investigate potential suspects for The Minnesota Shrike.

It is a Thursday afternoon when Hannibal and Jack drive to a construction site; one of the laboratory technicians had noticed a shred of metal fiber on one of the girls' corpses, which had led them to investigating construction sites for anything, or *anybody* suspicious.

When Hannibal glazes over the papers inside of the construction site's office, he is drawn to one particular name; Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He can tell almost instantaneously that he is suspicious, however, he knows it is a drastic leap to take. Either way, Hannibal is not very fond of children, and he enjoys the idea that him and the man have the same *tastes*, particularly in *meat*.

Hannibal returns the file to it's rightful place, mentally noting the phone number on the resignation letter. *He could have some fun with this*, he thinks.

As Jack skims over the files, he lets out a sigh of exasperation. For an FBI worker, he isn't very observant. He looks past Garrett Jacob Hobbs' resignation letter, despite it's suspicious nature. How interesting.

When they return to the car, Hannibal makes a show of checking his wristwatch. "I am afraid that is all the time I am able to give. I must return to my office, I have an appointment with a patient in two hours."

"Of course." Jack strokes his chin in thought, clearly frustrated at not getting anywhere with the case today. "Sorry for dragging you out here."

The apology is lacklustre, but Hannibal accepts it anyway. "No worries. Tomorrow is always another day."

After Hannibal's appointments, he returns home. It isn't until after his dinner that he gives Garrett Jacob Hobbs any further thought.

It takes a simple online search to find him on the internet. Hobbs is not very present, besides from the odd photo of him hunting. However, one photo catches his attention.

When the pieces are in-front of Hannibal, he chides himself for not realising it sooner; Garrett Jacob Hobbs has a daughter who fits the profile of the other children *exactly*. She is roughly five or six, with auburn hair; plain, but pretty. She has a toothy grin, and a witty look in her eyes. Hannibal imagines that she is a well-behaved child, a 'teacher's pet'.

It is something in her eyes that tells Hannibal that she is much more intelligent than she lets on.

Hannibal wonders if she shares the same appetite as her father, and if her father had taught her to hunt.

How very, very interesting.

As Hannibal pours himself another glass of wine, he entertains his options on what to do next.

Hannibal's choice is made one week later.

Since that first night, Hannibal had spent more than one occasion researching into Hobbs, particularly his daughter.

The more he thought of it, the more he wanted to see her and get to know her mind. He had never came into contact with a case of a possible sociopath so young. Hannibal didn't enjoy giving therapy to children, or children in general, but this particular child had intrigued him *immensely*.

When Hannibal was called to the FBI headquarters in Quantico, he knew that he had to give Jack a gentle nudge to spur him into action; consider it the moving of a proverbial chess piece, or making a proverbial puppet dance. He was curious what would happen.

It is then that he brings up the resignation letter from Hobbs, casually.

"I confess, it is unfortunate that there are no developments." Hannibal sighs.

"Indeed." Jack mumbles, brows furrowed at the files, as if he could silently make them talk to him.

"However. . . there are one or two construction workers who have piqued my interest. Their files and work history seem. . . suspicious, one might say."

"Suspicious how?" Jack perks up, looking to Hannibal expectantly.

"Well. . . this man here, Michael Watts, has taken one too many sick leaves. They match slightly with the timeline of the murders. . ." Hannibal continues to list off a few potential suspects, just to throw Jack away from his scent. ". . .and then there is Garrett Jacob Hobbs. His resignation letter has no address, just a phone number. If he has a daughter, we could be getting somewhere."

Jack runs his hand over his chin in deep thought, now gesturing to one of the other workers. "I need a background check done on those suspects. Now."

Hannibal fights a smile, now excusing himself to make a phone call. As far as anybody is concerned, Hannibal is making a call to a patient.

When the phone call is answered, he is not expecting the young, female voice that speaks.

"Hello?"

At that exact moment, Hannibal knows he has made the correct choice, yet he feels his control wavering. Such an innocent, pure-natured child. A sweet, mourning lamb.

"Hello, Abigail. Could you bring the phone to your father, please?"

Love at First Sight

Will Graham half-stumbles out of his car on Tuesday morning.

Most people might say that Mondays are the worst, but Will thinks that it is a myth. *All* days are the worst, especially the ones that begin with Will's alarm not waking him, leading to him breaking the speed limit in order to get to work.

Thankfully, Will arrives with a few minutes to spare. . . at the expense of his breakfast. If Will were dealing with adults at work, he would arrive fashionably late, but considering that he works with several tiny gremlins who would find a way to set the class ablaze without Will's supervision, he believes that missing breakfast is a worthwhile sacrifice to make.

As Will half-runs, half-jogs inside of the school building, he ignores the bemused glances he receives from the parents stood outside with their children. He can only imagine how he must look, according to them:

Yes, hello! I am the man taking care of your children! Yes, the one who broke the speed limit. Yes, the one who is coated in dog hairs. Yes, the man who cannot make eye-contact with you! I am completely trustworthy, despite having terrible social skills and avoiding conversations as much as humanly possible! Yes, I am also the man who has worn the same flannel two days in a row, now that you mention it. Yes, I am unmarried. Wasn't that obvious?

Will almost trips over his own laces when he skids through the empty corridors, which make him look down at his feet in betrayal- had he seriously forgotten to tie his laces? God, he was pathetic. Often, he found himself starting tasks and forgetting to finish them. But, that was besides the point. He will have to tie them later, he has more urgent things to do.

When Will gets into his classroom, he has a small fight with his satchel when it refuses to come off without tangling in his clothes. When he finally removes it, he checks the clock on the wall. Five minutes to spare, perfect.

After Will wipes his palms on his trousers to rid himself of any anxious clamminess, he takes out his laptop and connects it to the projector. For the past few years, Will had taught the fifth graders. However, this year he was kindly recommended to teach a younger class. Will did not blame his boss for being slightly pissed off at him. . .

It had happened when one of his curious fifth graders had brought up serial killers in the middle of their class discussion. Instead of changing the topic, Will had discussed the particular killer in more depth; he was fascinated by the news, and the different types of killers; their motives and their lives.

By the time the class was finished, Will had pictures from Tattlecrime displayed on his projector, to the bewildered gazes of each and every ten and eleven year old present.

The next day, his boss had brought him to his office and told Will that he had an angry phone call by a parent, demanding to know why Will was showing crime scene photos to young

children.

Ouch.

So maybe dealing with younger children might be easier. . .

"Hello?"

"Hello, Abigail. Could you bring the phone to your father, please?"

"Mkay! Daddy? It's for you!" The sound of shuffling, and then the sound of the phone being passed over.

"Who is it?" A far away voice asks, a male.

"I dunno. . . no number on the phone." Abigail mumbles, and then there is silence for a few moments.

"Hello?" The male voice speaks, uncertainty in his tone.

"Mr Garrett Jacob Hobbs?" Hannibal speaks low, keeping his eyes trained on his surroundings so that nobody approaches him. This is an extremely important phone call.

"Yeah."

"You don't know me and I suspect we'll never meet." Hannibal begins. "This is a courtesy call. Listen very carefully."

The man does not respond, and Hannibal can only hear the faint sound of sizzling. Hannibal wonders if he is in his kitchen cooking breakfast, and if so, is he frying meat? If Hannibal did not call, would the man serve this meat to his unsuspecting wife and daughter?

"Are you listening?" Hannibal breaks the silence.

"Yes." The man speaks breathlessly, undoubtedly shaken by the nature of the phone call.

Hannibal allows the call to go silent, watching as somebody walks past him, oblivious to the phone call occurring right beside them.

"They know."

The man begins to take shaky breaths, and after a few moments of drinking in his anxiety, Hannibal ends the call.

The rest of Hannibal's day unfolds rather quickly.

If Hannibal had been looking for a performance, he certainly succeeded in receiving one.

It is not long after that Jack Crawford finds Hannibal in the hallway, now urging Hannibal to come with him and several other FBI agents to Garrett Jacob Hobbs' home. Apparently, Jack's background check on Hobbs proved that he, indeed, had a daughter. More concerningly, Hobbs had recently taken to travelling around the coast around the time of the murders. Something in this information spurs Jack to want to go to his home, ASAP.

When the car skids to a stop, the FBI agents all simultaneously jump out of the car and into action, guns raised. Hannibal stands back, admiring the view of the performance.

Hannibal certainly did not anticipate to see an older woman, Garrett Jacob Hobbs' wife by the looks of it, stumbling out of the front door, grasping at her neck. Her throat has been slit open, and it is not long before she collapses to her knees and slumps to the side, weak and losing life rapidly.

This divides the FBI agent's numbers in two, as half of them rush to help Hobbs' wife, while the rest rush inside shouting and aiming guns.

Hannibal follows the latter.

As he goes inside, he makes a beeline to the kitchen; if the phone call is anything to go off of, he imagines that Hobbs has not left the kitchen since he was making breakfast earlier. Thankfully, the other agents had split up around the house, meaning only two are in the kitchen with Hobbs.

What Hannibal sees makes his gut churn without his permission.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs is knelt on the kitchen floor, whispering praise and encouragement to his wide-eyed, sobbing daughter, all whilst holding a knife to her throat. Such inoffensive, naive eyes; and they bore straight into Hannibal's as he enters the room.

"Garrett Jacob Hobbs! Step away from your daughter!" One of the FBI agents shouts over the commotion, gun aimed directly at Hobbs.

"Please. . .please, please- I'm sorry- I'm sorry- please- h-help me-" Abigail sniffles and cries out, and her eyes are still trained on Hannibal's. Despite the fact that this confrontation is his own doing, and the fact that Abigail is speaking to *all* of the FBI present in the room, Hannibal cannot help but feel like Abigail was speaking directly to him; for *his* help.

Not only that, but in that moment it feels as if Abigail's voice sounds all too familiar. Before he can realise what is happening, his heart pangs; he is reminded of Mischa, his dearest sister. It feels as if he were punched in the solar plexus and all of his breath has been taken from him. His mouth goes dry, and his throat closes up.

"Please. . ." *Please. Please save me, Hannibal. Show me what hunting really means. Teach me. Change me. Please, Hannibal.*

"Step away!" The FBI agent shouts again, but it is too late. Garrett Jacob Hobbs slits his daughters throat, and then the bullets fly.

As the other FBI agents scramble to stop Hobbs, Hannibal finds himself kneeling beside Abigail and pressing his hands firmly to her throat in order to keep the wound closed.

"Shhh now. . . it is alright. I am here. You are safe. Close your eyes, Mischa. . . wade into the quiet of the stream."

Abigail stares soundlessly back at Hannibal, eyes streaming with tears and lip quivering as she whimpers and cries with decreasing strength. Hannibal knows she has a very little chance of survival, but he knows that if she *does* live, that he will protect her with everything he has.

There was a time when Hannibal cared intensely for somebody; he cherished the ground Mischa walked on. Everything that Mischa did, Hannibal taught her himself. He took pride in being a father figure to her, despite only being a few years older. He sketched her all of the time; her sat by the window in their old home, her laughing, her pouting when she didn't get her way, her in the outdoors, her doing *everything*. When she passed away, that part of Hannibal's heart had closed up. . . and he thought it may never open up again, but now it has.

He had one chance before; the teacup had been shattered, and now it had came back together.

Now he knew he had to keep this teacup locked away, wrapped in the finest of boxes.

Call it 'love at first sight'.

At the end of the day, Will leads the children outside and stands by them as they search out their parents in the crowd.

It is moments like these when Will feels strangely envious of the relationships these children have with their parents. He shouldn't feel jealous of a child, but his heart sometimes yearns for the connection he never had; the paternal love with his own father.

On most days, Will walked home from school alone, even if it was raining or snowing. He made his own dinner every day, if they even had the food. On lucky days, Will could make himself sandwiches or noodles. However, Will had became rightfully scared of using the kettle when he had accidentally dropped it and spilled boiling water all over himself. He remembers how he had cried, and how his father was too drunk on the couch to even wake up or hear him. He remembers how scared he felt of the monsters at night, and how other children said their parents would scare the monsters away.

Will still had monsters today, and he had never had somebody to scare them away, not once.

Will always wrote his own permission slips and sick notes, on behalf of his father. The older he got, the more he had learned how to get the things he wanted; he often took money from his father's wallet whilst he was asleep in order to buy himself food, or he'd occasionally steal clothes and hide them away until they looked worn down enough to pass as clothes Will had already owned, and not previously bought.

It was a tough life, but he had made it work.

It was moments like those that had made Will glad to be a teacher; he remembers one particular teacher doting on him when he was in high school.

When she noticed he came into school without a lunch, she would bring in extra food to feed him, or she would let him borrow books to read, if he wanted them. She was too old to be considered the 'young, attractive teacher', but Will had developed a teenage crush on her anyway. Maybe it was the way she had given him the maternal love that he had never received. Either way, that teacher had changed his life and his perspective on a lot of things.

It was why he became a teacher of his own.

Despite not being the pinnacle of social skills or perfection, Will prides himself on keeping an extra eye out for the quieter, more reserved children. A long time ago, that child was him. He always brings in extra lunch, or takes the time to speak to a student if they ever want to talk, or just require extra help. He's gained quite a soft spot for all of the children, and it is a therapeutic way of fixing Will's own inner child.

When one child lingers beside Will, he kneels down to give him a small smile.

"Hey buddy, do you know if your mom or dad is coming yet?"

"I dunno. . ." The child mumbles, his eyes fixed on the lessening crowds of parents.

After subtly checking his watch to see the time, Will realises that this child's parent is twenty minutes late.

"Well that's alright. Do you wanna hang out with me? I can be cool." Will adjusts himself into a sitting position, now patting the ground beside him.

"Um. . . okay." The child speaks slowly, now sitting beside Will.

"Do you like dogs?"

The child perks up a little, now nodding in excitement.

"I've got dogs. Guess how many-? *Seven*."

"Seven?!" The child exclaims, his eyes lighting up and a grin appearing on his face.

"Seven. Do you want to see a photo of them?"

"Okay." The child scoots closer, and Will takes out his phone to show the child some of the photos he has of his dogs.

"This one is Buster. . .and this one is Winston. . .they're all strays. I save them when they're cold and hungry on the street."

"That's *so* cool. My mommies have a dog. Her name is Applesauce."

"Applesauce?" Will feels himself smiling. "The dog, or one of your mommies?" He jokes, which makes the child laugh.

"The dog's name is Applesauce."

"Ah, I see. That's a cute name."

"She's a very cute dog." Another voice interjects, making both Will and the child look up from their seated positions. Will feels slightly embarrassed, especially due to the fact that he had made a joke about the woman's name being Applesauce a few moments prior.

A young woman stands in-front of them, her hair brown and her face kind. When she looks to the boy, she reaches a hand out and he takes it.

"Hi there." Will stands up awkwardly, pocketing his phone and brushing off any dust he may have on his ass. "You must be his mother?"

"Yes, I am. I'm sorry for being late. . . work delays, and my wife was caught up in her own work."

"No worries. He's a cool guy." Will looks to the boy as he speaks, giving him a wink, which makes him grin at Will in return.

"Well, we'd better be going. Thank you for looking after him."

"No problem at all. . .-" Will trails off.

"Alana. Alana Bloom." The woman replies.

"Will Graham." Will checks his watch again, the topic of dogs reminding him of his own; he will need to return to them soon.

"Well, do not let us delay you any more. Say bye to the nice man, Morgan."

"Bye, Mister Graham."

"Not at all, Alana. Bye, Morgan." Will smiles, Alana giving him a small wave as she leaves towards the parking area.

That night when Will returns home, he nurses a whiskey by the fireplace as he grades a few of the worksheets he had assigned. It does not take long, considering it is only a matter of fixing childish spelling mistakes. His dogs are all curled up by his feet, content with their full bellies and warmth from the fire. When Will is done grading, he allows himself to relax and close his eyes momentarily. Usually these late night grading sessions go depressing quickly, and tonight is no exception.

He shouldn't be so lonely this late into his life. He is nearing forty, yet he feels entirely alienated from the world; platonically and romantically.

Perhaps it is his own fault, too.

In order to make friends, Will needs to open up. However, opening up means being vulnerable, and potentially showing other people the monsters that reside in the darkest crevices of his mind. He is not ready to do that.

He doubt he ever will be.

Hook, Line, and Sinker

Chapter Notes

SORRY FOR THE DELAY WITH THIS ONE!!
it was dumb luck that the previous chapters were posted so close together, but i will try my best to update this as frequently as possible! :)
ENJOY XOXO

Will is woken up by his dogs halfway through the night.

Well, he is presuming it is halfway through the night, considering his bedroom is still flooded in darkness. Will's limbs feel heavy and sluggish as he sits up with a groggy head and furrowed brows. What was all the noise about so late into the night? Knowing Will's luck, it was probably an animal outside, waiting to kill him for once and for all.

As Will attempts to shush his dogs and calm them down, he drags his weary limbs out of his bed, now padding towards his front door. Upon peering outside the screen door, tired eyes narrowing at the darkness, he feels himself frowning. No animals to be seen. . .but then again, maybe it was something as small as a rabbit; it must've got scared and ran away once the dogs had alerted it.

However, Will finds himself reaching for the gun he leaves by the door anyway. Realistically, a man shouldn't own a gun and wave it about so flippantly, nevertheless, Will lives in quite a secluded area, so having a gun stashed beside your door is considered normal, especially because of the wild animals that live in the surrounding forests of Will’s property.

Will is not a paranoid man either, but now that he has become more and more engrossed in the likes of Tattlecrime, he realises that he has begun to do rituals that he would have *never* considered before; about three months ago, he had changed the locks on his doors, and added new bolts to each and every window. One cannot be *too* safe, especially in an economy with killers that rip out people’s tongues and use them as bookmarks in Bibles.

After contemplating his choices for some time, possibly seconds or whole minutes, Will carefully opens his front door with one hand, his gun firmly in the other. When he nudges the door open with the tip of his bare foot, he watches it swing open with a creak. He knows that if somebody (or something) were to jump on him now, they would take the creaking door as a sign to pounce, so he waits. . .

Silence.

It takes Will another few moments until he musters up the courage to carefully make his way out onto his porch, his gun raised. His gaze sweeps along the perimeter of his property, but he

is disappointed when he sees nothing there. Despite his vision being well-attuned to the darkness, there is a slight fog in the air, which disables him slightly.

Will recalls countless hours spent nighttime-hunting during the summer, when the children were not in school. He needed ways to waste time, and it wasn't as if he *had* people to go out with. Maybe once or twice in his life; he had made brief acquaintances, along with one or two partners who he had fleeting connections with. Otherwise, he had attempted to go to the likes of bars or cafes alone, only to discover that he felt *incredibly* awkward and out of place, so he had given up and began hunting in his spare time instead.

But now, Will almost feels entirely out of his element. He prides himself on having a strong sense of the outdoors, *and* a secure connection with all seven of his dogs; he trained them to be perfectly obedient, and based on the barking, Will imagines that whoever or whatever was outside was somewhat of a threat.

But where was the threat now?

Will ventures further out onto his porch, and it is only when he steps on a rock, he realises that he had left the house without putting on shoes, socks *or* a coat. The cold is almost biting in its nature, and Will fights the urge to shiver; now is not the time.

A rustle in one of the trees makes Will tense up, his gun raising ever so slightly to aim toward the sound, but he is more than relieved when he sees that it is just a bird.

Stupid bird.

The encounter makes Will realise how truly on edge he is; his entire body feels ready to collapse, and he finally caves. After stubbornly looking along the edge of his property once more, he lets out an audible sigh and retreats back to the warmth- not so warm anymore, considering his front door was left open- of his home.

After giving a soothing pat to his dogs, Will gingerly wipes any residue remaining from outside on his feet onto a random dirty shirt. He must have left it discarded on his couch, most likely in one of his drunken stupors. The memory of it makes Will grimace to himself, and it further confirms his suspicions that he is a middle-aged loser. How naive he was to think that one day, when he got older, he would get friends.

As a child, Will never connected with *anyone*; for some reason, everybody thought that he was wise beyond his years. But now that he is an adult surrounded by other adults, they say he is strange. So much for being *wise*.

As Will collapses onto his bed, he curls up into his sheets and checks the time briefly on his phone-

Fuck.

Almost 4AM.

He needed to get some shuteye, especially if he wanted to arrive at work a bit more on time.

When Will closes his eyes and finds himself settling down, a shadow shifts by the window to peer further inside at Will's peaceful frame.

Without realising it, Hannibal finds himself spending most of his free time in the hospital, observing Abigail's state. She is in a coma, and it is uncertain when or *if* she will wake. Either way, Hannibal is satisfied to know that her vitals are stable. It seems promising to him.

Ever since her father had slit her throat open, Hannibal has made Abigail's wellbeing his primary concern. She had such *marvellous* potential, and he knew that he could not let her go to waste. Those bright blue eyes, boring straight into Hannibal's;

"Please. . .please, please- I'm sorry- I'm sorry- please- h-help me-"

Hannibal recounts the scene over and over, and sometimes she appears in his dreams, like an omen.

Most of the time, the dream is almost exactly the same as the real events; Hannibal strides into the kitchen, Garrett Jacob Hobbs is there, and Abigail's neck is slit open. Sometimes, Hannibal is the one holding the gun that kills Hobbs; other times, Hannibal is in the position of Hobbs, and watches himself striding into the kitchen and observing as he opens Abigail's neck.

On rare occasions, Hannibal has dreams where it is not Abigail in that Minnesota kitchen; it is Mischa. *Those* are the dreams that leave Hannibal startling himself awake and staring off into space for a few moments in an attempt to recollect himself.

However, Hannibal is always comforted to know that almost every time he wakes, it is beside Abigail. If he had the opportunity, he would spend *all* of his time in the hospital, but he has patients to attend to. On top of that, Hannibal likes his own bed *too* much to sacrifice it for an uncomfortable hospital chair. He likes Abigail, but not *that* much. Whilst he was intrigued by her, he is yet to have a conversation with her. He does not mind accompanying her bedside and entertaining her, but he knows that when the time comes for her to wake, he will need to be absolutely and irrefutably certain about his choice. A child is an unreliable variable, whether he admires her sociopathic upbringing or not. To take a child into your own refuge is a *huge* responsibility, and Hannibal must consider each and every alternative before he decides to bring a potentially homicidal girl into his home.

Although, Hannibal is quite sure that disciplining her will be no issue.

When Hannibal is not sleeping, he reads to Abigail. He has made a habit of bringing books, both English and Lithuanian, for Abigail to listen to. Hannibal is aware that Abigail may not be conscious enough to hear or feel him, but that does not stop him from reading aloud, one of his own hands holding both of hers. More often than not, the reading is for his own comfort too; silences can weigh heavy, especially as of recently.

In other occurrences, Hannibal spends his spare time doing paperwork. As of recently, he has researched into the process of adoption; it could take somewhere between months or *years* . Hannibal simply does not have that sort of time. *Anything* could occur in that space of time.

Hannibal is nothing but patient, but the idea of Abigail being handed off to the wolves after experiencing such debilitating trauma makes Hannibal's gut turn in distaste. He can only imagine what other children would say to her, how they would treat her.

He could not allow *grimy* , *prying* fingers near her.

So, what to do? How can one speed the process up? Hannibal is intelligent, but he finds himself at a loss. It is not as if he is an unfit parent; if anything, he is *quite* the opposite.

He imagines that adoption agencies would fall over their heels to allow him to adopt. He is a former surgeon (good money), he is a psychiatrist (so he can handle Abigail's trauma efficiently), and he is seen to be *extremely* responsible. Hannibal donates to *many* charities, when given the chance, and he is an active member in the community. Every move that Hannibal makes is not without intention; the FBI will *always* be following, and he would like to imagine that the paper trail he leaves behind is nothing but up to standard. His positive attributes to the public eye only grow and grow by the second;

And the Chesapeake Ripper would never dream of having a child.

Will wakes up in time for his alarm this morning, which is a miracle in itself.

As it turns out, Will's midnight adventures were not going to stop; it had been roughly two weeks since the first, and ever since, Will has found himself being woken up every night around the same time, only to scan the perimeter of his garden and find nothing. It had confused him beyond measure, and each time he would look over his shoulder to his dogs, as if they would tell him the answer as to why they were so alarmed.

These late night occurrences had only added to Will's increasing anxieties about the world beyond his doorstep, or rather, his porch. There was a time where he'd spend the weekends with his dogs in the forest, but now he had felt hesitant. Each and every tree or shadow in the darkness had made him pause. He now carried his gun with him *everywhere* around his property; he was nothing short of bringing the gun with him to work, but he knew that he certainly couldn't. If he was paranoid, he could not bring that with him to an environment with children.

Deep down, he hoped that whoever or whatever was after him, would take that into account too.

Not even a psychopath would endanger the lives of children just to reach *one* man. Will lives in a secluded area, it practically *screams* 'MURDER ME!'.

That is the motivation he needs to keep his gun safely stowed away by his front door, and then he leaves to make his way to work.

Upon patting his pockets to ensure that he had his phone, keys, and wallet, he gives one last goodbye to his dogs. As he goes outside, he is immediately hit by the bite of the cold air, and he contemplates making a quick detour to retrieve his scarf.

He quite enjoys the colder weather; of course, he had hated it when he was a boy. The colder months had meant that Will had to walk to school with a tattered jacket, and it was not made for biting breezes and intense snows. He remembers walking by other children and teenagers around his age, seeing their scarves and gloves, and getting notions of envy; it was not their fault that they were privileged, but *god* , the things he would do for a scarf like theirs, or even just a coat. He remembers when he had used his father's stolen money to buy a new jacket, and how he couldn't wait to wear it. However, his father had recognised it immediately; to this day, Will wished he could have waited a little while longer before putting it on, then he would have still owned the jacket. That night, Will's father had woken him up in the middle of the night, completely inebriated, and made Will watch as he set the coat on fire in their backyard. His father's cruel laugh still reverberates in his mind.

He checks his watch, deciding to quickly turn and jog back toward his bedroom, wrapping himself in the scarf as he jogs back outside. He enjoys the cold now. Even though he lives as a humble man with a small home and his seven dogs, it is a lot better than the life he had in the past. He didn't need grand gestures to feel accomplished.

Most of the time.

When Will steps off of his porch, his steps slow down near his driveway. It had been snowing overnight, he knew that because of how he had watched it fall during his midnight venture. However, Will distinctly remembers not stepping off of his porch.

So why were there footsteps in the snow? Boot marks, for sure.

Will feels his body run cold with nerves, and he makes sure to step his own feet into the footprints, just so he can see where they were leading to. As he traces the steps, he realises that the prints were circling around his home, and stopping by his bedroom window. The idea of it makes Will feel sick to his stomach; was he being stalked?

He looks up to the sky, watching as the flakes of snow twirl and dance around him. . . .

Surely if these were nighttime footprints, they would be covered by now.

Fuck .

These are fresh footprints.

He has to leave. Now.

Hannibal's attention is diverted from his paperwork when he catches the scent of artificial flowers. It is certainly unique, especially in an environment permeated by the smell of disinfectant, antiseptics, disease and must. However, it is not a scent that he is unfamiliar with. He can anticipate her before she even enters the room.

"Doctor Lecter- *Hannibal.* Hi."

Hannibal turns, feigning surprise. “ *Alana* . How nice it is to see you here.” He straightens his paperwork, now setting it to the side as he stands to greet Alana Bloom.

“I could say the same. . . you’re looking perky.” She jokes lightly, offering him a sympathetic, yet kind smile. She doesn’t stare at him for long, walking by him to stand closer to Abigail’s bed and gaze down at her face with an expression of sadness.

“Well, I have spent a lot of my time here. It is not the *best* of places to rest, I must tell you.” Hannibal replies, keeping an eye on Alana and her increasing proximity to Abigail.

Hannibal had an idea that *somebody* from the FBI would come to visit sooner or later. By the process of elimination, he knew that that person would be Alana, especially with a child of her own. She consulted on the cases, but she could not provide much, considering that her personal feelings and her bias were too strong. She had felt incredible contempt towards Garrett Jacob Hobbs, and Hannibal could not blame her for it.

Now that he had Alana in his midst, he knew that wearing these clothes was a good choice. Typically, he would only be seen in nothing but the finest three-piece suits, a matching pocket square and cufflinks. For the past while, Hannibal has worn nothing but sweaters and slacks. Of course, these were *far* from Hannibal at ‘his worst’, but they were definitely a step down from his previous attire. And anyway, nobody had to know about the duffel bag in Hannibal’s trunk, where he kept a suit each day for him to change into as soon as he reached his office. He would still like to maintain his look for his patients; but for the FBI? *Not a chance.*

“I’m sorry to hear that, Hannibal.” Alana mumbles, reaching down to take one of Abigail’s hands and stroke her finger along the back of it gently. “Poor thing. . . she must have been *so* scared.”

“Certainly. And so was I.” He feigns an expression of concern as Alana’s head turns, and her face softens.

“Oh, Hannibal.” She walks over, now placing a hand on his bicep. “I can only imagine. . . I mean- with a child of my own, you have *so* much more strength than I do.”

“I suppose so. . . where is Morgan today, may I ask? I am so used to him accompanying you everywhere, like a secretary.” He allows himself to joke, which earns a small smile from Alana.

“At school.”

“School? My, it seems like yesterday when he was still a toddler.”

“You’re telling me.” Alana lets out a small laugh, now standing away in favour of finding a spare seat and sitting down. “Somebody is very melancholy today. . .”

Yes, he supposes he is. He has placed the breadcrumbs leading to his proverbial trap, and now Alana just had to walk into it. The clothes, the paperwork, the supposed emotions from a man who rarely displays them, the *everything* .

Every move that Hannibal makes is not without intention; the FBI will always be following.

“I did not expect to be figured out so easily. . .” He muses, allowing his eyes to go to Abigail as she rests. The pang in his heart that he feels is not fake, but he allows his expression to show it more than he usually would.

When Alana’s eyes follow his, her brows furrow momentarily, and then she lets out a soft gasp. “You. . . you’ve grown attached to her.”

“Well. . . when you phrase it like that. . .”

“No, no- I’m sorry. Maybe I am prying. I think it’s great that you care for her. I am just surprised. I would have never taken you as a man who. . .well. . . would *want* children.”

“Would you not?” He allows his brows to raise, and his surprise is genuine. When he considers it, he didn’t take himself as a man who would want a child either, but having it repeated back to him feels more offending than it should be. He is *perfectly* responsible and capable.

"Well-” She cuts herself off, now biting onto her lip gently. “I’m sorry. . . I really am. I mean- the clothes, you spending so much time here, *everything* - I should have known. It happens to the best of us. We all have a case that affects us. She’s a poor, *poor* girl. . . she is the type who will bounce between foster homes until she is eighteen, and *then* what?”

Hannibal doesn’t respond for a moment, his eyes diverting towards his paperwork. “ *Well* . . . I was thinking about that myself too. I am greatly concerned for her wellbeing, considering her youth and the foster care system. . .” He reaches over to pick the papers up, displaying them to Alana. “Perhaps I went too far.”

“And what are those?” She frowns, now leaning over and offering her hand out, and Hannibal places the papers in her hand. After flicking through each page, her expression only grows softer and more concerned. “ *Hannibal* . . . you were thinking of adopting her. . .?”

“Ridiculous, I’m sure.”

“ *No* . . . not at all. I- I think it’s heroic, but- you are too close to the case.”

“I could protect her.” Hannibal speaks assertively now; he has Alana right outside his trap, now he just needs her to take the bait.

“I’m sure you could, but- adoption could take *months* , maybe *years* to approve.”

“I’m a decent citizen. I have money- I was a *surgeon* . I am a psychiatrist- I could understand her like nobody else can.” That, he knew for certain.

Alana worries her lip between her top teeth, not looking into Hannibal’s eyes in favour of staring down at the papers again. “You’re *really* serious about this. . .” She whispers, mostly to herself.

“I am. I thought. . . maybe somebody could help me. . .” Hannibal waits for a moment, allowing Alana to absorb his words. When she doesn’t reply, he presses further. “Perhaps. . . speed up the process. . . approve of me. I need somebody who knows me well. . .”

“You want me to approve your adoption form. . .?” Alana looks away from the papers and into Hannibal’s eyes.

“Yes. Could you do that for me?”

“I. . .I don’t know. . .” She looks worried, her lips tugging into a frown. “I don’t know if I have that kind of power. . . I’m a consultant, sure, but. . .”

“Please. You know that I am not a begging man, Alana. But I am certain that this is the correct thing to do. Jack and the FBI view you quite highly, so having you on my side would be more than enough.”

Hannibal knows that playing the ‘morality’ card will catch Alana. She is the epitome of the metaphorical ‘moral high ground’. She does nothing but ‘the correct thing’. He knows that she will feel nothing but righteous for this.

“Alright. . . I can try my best, Hannibal.”

“Thank you, Alana.”

Hook, line, and sinker.

Always Watching

When Will opens his eyes, he finds that he is on the forest floor.

That cannot be right- when did he get here?

He is definitely in a forest; he has the grating stones and jabbing sticks to thank for that, all burrowing into his flesh. Is he *naked* ?

No. He has clothes on.

Everything feels heightened; every sound is louder and every touch is like electricity coursing through his veins.

He cannot move.

Why can't he move?

There is something on his chest-

No.

Someone.

Will cannot quite place his finger on how he is feeling; he feels sick to his stomach, and *scared.*

When he forces his eyes away from the night sky and towards the thing on his chest, he realises that it is just sitting there, not pinning him down. However, Will's limbs feel like they are tied down, yet lack any restraint. He must be dreaming; this must be sleep paralysis.

He needs to wake up.

He needs to *move.*

Please, please move.

The creature acknowledges Will's consciousness, its face staring down at Will's. . .except. . . the creature has no face. The creature lacks any features; it is as if the creature has a blur over its face, and featureless flesh remains.

As if hitting the 'play' button, the air shifts. Everything begins to move at once.

The creature's hands spring to Will's neck, as if trying to strangle him. Will can finally move his arms, but he finds that he cannot pry the creature's fingers from him. The creature's hands are a vice, confining Will.

Is this how he will die?

As Will's legs kick and thrash, he cannot find purchase.

There is nothing he can do.

He is going to die.

Alone.

" *You are not alone* ." It whispers through the trees, and it makes Will's heart wrench with sickness-

---

Will heaves out a few gasps as he sits up, his fingers clawing at his throat, as if still trying to fight the phantom fingers that once held him there.

His head rapidly jolts around to take in his surroundings. He is at home. He is safe. He is awake. It was just a nightmare.

He hasn't experienced a nightmare like that in *months* .

His nightmares used to be *quite* a turn-off for any potential partners Will might have had back then. Back when he had a bit more *hope* for gaining a partner; back when he had one (for a little while). He had always felt embarrassed about his night terrors, especially when they had made him wake up drenched in his own sweat and gasping for air like an asthmatic. Nobody likes a man who humiliates himself like that- *most people.* He had a few partners who had comforted him about it, at first. One or two had been fascinated about his dreams, and what had occurred in them. However, almost always, they had grown tired of him and his antics. He did not blame them; he would run away too.

His stomach feels uneasy; he does not feel safe.

The dogs are not barking.

Something moves by the window .

Will's head snaps towards it, and he finds his legs moving before his mind can catch up. *Surely* something was there. He was not insane. He is stable. He saw something.

Didn't he?

As if somebody places the thoughts into his head, he remembers everything in small increments;

The dogs barked every night, without fail.

The footprints in the snow.

The nightmare.

"You are not alone. . ."

He was not alone.

Somebody is on his property.

Somebody was at his window.

Will darted out of his bedroom without a second thought, waking a few of his dogs in the process. As if on cue, they began to bark at the walls, as if sensing someone's presence there.

Will has no time to hesitate; whoever is stalking him needs to stop. *Tonight.*

As he grabs his gun, he rushes out the front door. His hands are shaking; he cannot be scared, now is not the time.

Yet, the churning in his stomach is too sickening to ignore; where are you, you *sick* motherfucker? Come the fuck out, *coward.*

Will's breaths come laboured as he scans his garden, gun raised.

It isn't until he feels the hot, salty liquid going down his face and towards his mouth, he realises that he is crying; for *fuck's* sake. He can't cry. Not now.

He audibly sniffles and scans his garden again. Surely if he was going to get killed, it should happen now? Why would they terrorise him and torture his thoughts every night? Just kill him and get it over with.

Perhaps it is his disrupted sleep schedule that is making him so highly emotional and irritable right now. He has felt the effects of his severed rest slowly building and building; it was only a matter of time before he snapped. And then what?

Maybe he needed a break.

A holiday.

No , he can't. Not when he works with children who depend on him.

After a few minutes of heavy silence, Will feels his shoulders slump and his weariness catching up to him. It practically hits him like a giant fucking *truck* . He scrubs a hand over his face, now turning to go back into his house.

This has been occurring to him for the best part of two months now.

As Will's back falls onto the bed, he cannot get rid of the constant whispering that echoes in his head;

"You are not alone. . ."

"You are not alone. . ."

"You are not alone. . ."

Hannibal is fully aware that the process of adopting Abigail will take some time, *however* , now that he has convinced Alana Bloom to fight his corner, he is reassured that his waiting period will be significantly decreased.

Hannibal is nothing but forbearing, although, it would be much preferable if Abigail was his sooner, rather than later.

Hannibal is pondering on this as his patient, Franklyn Froideveaux is talking about cheese. Hannibal would be *much* more considerate about Franklyn's feelings, had he been talking about something of *significance* , but it seems that Franklyn's one and only issue worth mentioning, is his fascination with his own therapist.

However, his attention wavers from his thoughts and Franklyn's musings on cheese when he catches the smell of somebody familiar;

The mass-produced body spray that thinly veils the scent of old files, burned coffee, disease, and stress.

Jack Crawford.

Hannibal's eyes subtly divert to the clock above Franklyn's head, calculating how much time he has until he has to converse with the Head of the Behavioural Science Unit.

Fifteen minutes.

A pity, for Jack Crawford at least. Anticipation and delayed gratification is Hannibal's strength, but it may not be Jack's.

He wonders if Jack has the decency to stand by and wait until Hannibal's appointment is finished, or will his ire be his Achilles Heel. Would Hannibal be particularly *angry* at Jack for interrupting? Not exactly. It is unbecoming and rude, sure, but considering that it is Franklyn, Hannibal would not be so concerned.

"-what do you think, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal pauses for a moment, eyes meeting Franklyn's. "I think you should do what feels right in your heart."

Franklyn always succumbs to encouragement and praise, much like a dog. Based on his reaction, Hannibal has said the correct response, despite not listening to a word he was saying.

"That's what I was thinking too. I've got to do what feels right for me. . . and, *well.* . ." He pauses, now playing with his fingers idly as he deliberates on what to say next. "I was *thinking* on the topic of doing things that feel *right* . . . you and I, we get along well, right?"

"I am your therapist, Franklyn. It is important that we maintain a close relationship in order for us to progress through your emotions and traumas."

“Well- *yeah* . So. . .I was *thinking* . . . you and I. . . we could totally hang out together sometime. Like- *buddies* . We could be great *friends* .”

Hannibal’s head tilts, and he looks at the clock again; five minutes.

“. . . Your silence worries me, Doctor Lecter.” Franklyn lets out a nervous chuckle, now spinning to look behind him, spotting the clock. “Ah. You want me to leave, is that it?”

“It is reasonable that you would like to be my friend, Franklyn.” Hannibal ignores Franklyn’s last comment, for the sake that he was *quite* close to telling him that yes, he would like him to leave. “I know intimate details about your life, so it is understandable that you enjoy our conversations. However, I must maintain our professional relationship. I am not your friend. I am a listening ear, nothing more.”

“Oh. . .” Franklyn frowns, and his hands wring together again. “Was it something I did?” His bottom lip juts out, and he pathetically resembles a sad walrus, as opposed to a sad puppy.

“Not at all. I am comfortable keeping our relationship professional. But I appreciate the sentiment.”

“Right. . .” Franklyn relents, clearly surprised that this interaction did not go as anticipated. “Well. . . I’d better be going then.” Franklyn quickly stands, fumbling at his coat in an attempt to fluff his feathers back up and gain back his pride.

“Of course. I expect to see you next Thursday at four o’clock?” Hannibal also stands, casually directing Franklyn towards the patient exit.

“Yes. Next Thursday.” Franklyn mutters, a hint of insecurity in his tone. Hannibal would feel guilty, but he finds that there is little he can do about Franklyn’s fixation. Quite frankly, he is bored of him.

“See you then.” Hannibal opens the door, and lo and behold, there stands Jack Crawford.

They exchange a small nod, neither speaking until Franklyn awkwardly shuffles past, now glancing over his shoulder and slowing as if he could catch a bit of their conversation.

“Doctor Lecter. I hope I am not disturbing you.” Jack begins, his expression somewhat guarded.

“Not on a first-name basis?” Hannibal muses, standing aside to allow Jack to enter his office. “I must be in trouble. I have got an hour before my next patient. What brings you here, Jack?”

“Not in trouble. Just visiting. . . I needed to talk to you about Abigail Hobbs.” Jack strides inside, glancing around Hannibal’s office like he had the first time. This time, he seats himself on one of the chairs.

“I see.” Hannibal closes the door gently, now making his way to his globe. “May I offer you a drink? Whiskey? Wine?” He opens the globe with a flourish, giving a small indulgent smile to Jack, who finds himself returning it.

“Not today, unfortunately. I have to drive home.”

“Suit yourself.” Hannibal pours himself a glass of wine, now shutting the globe and making his way over to Jack. He sits down, swirling his wine and scenting it, before taking a small sip.

“Firstly, how is Abigail? I hear you have been frequently visiting her. I would have visited myself, but I have been caught up in paperwork and new cases.”

Hannibal wishes to correct Jack and inform him that he was not ‘too busy’, he just didn’t *bother* . He smiles anyway. “I have been frequenting her hospital room, yes. I was *quite* concerned for her. She is healing nicely. It is a miracle that her vitals are all stable . . I’m presuming you’ve spoken to Alana Bloom?”

“Yes, I have. I was not aware that you two knew each other.”

“Briefly. I mentored her at Johns Hopkins. We’re both colleagues and friends.”

“Right. Well- she mentioned to me about your concerns with Abigail. . . and she brought up wanting to adopt her. I mentioned that I hadn’t taken you for a man who would adopt, and Alana had told me the same. You seemed off-put by it when Alana mentioned it, so I will not pry.” He punctuates his sentence with a small laugh, but Hannibal does not bite.

“Yes. I was considering adoption. She seems like a bright young girl, and I could offer her many things- comfort, a safe home, education,-”

“Of course.” Jack interrupts, which makes Hannibal bristle. “I do not doubt for a second that you would be an *excellent* parent, let's be honest, but. . . my concerns are with *her* , not *you* .”

“Oh?” Hannibal takes another sip of his wine, hiding his growing smile behind the rim. He cannot say that he was expecting this approach. As soon as he caught sight of Jack’s solemn expression, he was expecting a thorough telling off for even *considering* adopting Abigail; however, he should have known better. Hannibal is a model citizen, so of course his willingness to adopt Abigail would be seen as normal. Abigail, however, is the daughter of a serial killer; of course the likes of Jack Crawford would worry over Hannibal. *She* is the monster, *not him* .

That could be nothing further from the truth .

“Oh indeed.” Jack mumbles, taking a deep breath and staring at Hannibal warily, weighing up his words. “There’s rumours that Abigail may have been *helping* her father. . . imagine you’re a five year old little girl; who would you prefer to walk away with? A middle aged man? Or another five year old girl?”

“Jack. . . in order for Abigail to have helped her father, that would mean that she was either *extremely* abused and manipulated, or she is some sort of sociopath. That is all the more reasoning for me to adopt her. I am a psychiatrist. I am well-versed and well-equipped to take her into my care.”

Jack Crawford falls silent, staring at Hannibal for a few moments. He lets out a sharp huff, now stroking at his chin in thought. Hannibal takes another sip of his wine.

“I will be worried about you, Hannibal. You’re an *excellent* consultant, and you’re a *great* asset to the team. If you get harmed, I will be the one to blame.”

“Jack. If you do not mind me saying, I believe some reassurance and comfort are in Abigail’s best interests right now. Perhaps when she wakes, having someone like myself to be a crutch for her would *seriously* aid her physical and mental health. If she wants to harm me, let her try. I would like to imagine that I would not be spooked by her. I am *much* stronger than you think.”

“. . . Alright. But I would like her to attend regular therapy sessions.”

“That will be no issue-”

“-with Alana Bloom. I apologise, Hannibal, but if you are going to adopt Abigail, I would like someone who is not as connected to her to be giving her the therapy.”

“Alana Bloom has a child of her own. Surely that would affect the process?”

Jack considers that, but then gives a small shrug. “You have a point. I just don’t want you carrying this burden on your own.”

“I decided to carry this burden the moment I considered the adoption. I *want* to do this. I am *willing* to. If I had known that adopting Abigail would have brought all of this questioning, I might have written a resume.” He lightly jokes, finally taking another sip from his wine.

“I apologise. Like I said, I’m concerned.”

“Well don’t be. I am perfectly capable.”

“Yes. . .” Jack nods slowly, finally letting out a sigh, the tension dissipating from his shoulders. “Yes, I can see that. As long as you are certain.” Jack eyes Hannibal one last time, his eyes searching Hannibal’s countenance for *anything* he could use.

“Yes, I am quite sure.”

“Alright. . .thank you, Hannibal, for reassuring me.” Jack relaxes into the chair. “And thank you for helping Abigail. You’re a kind man.”

“It is not a problem at all, Jack.” Hannibal indulgently smiles, now finishing his glass of wine.

The tension in Will’s car the next morning practically *suffocates* him.

The morning after Will’s semi-breakdown and paranoia, he woke up feeling even more exhausted. It seemed as if the crying had drained him, emotionally and physically.

After dragging himself out of bed and into the shower, he went through his morning routine on auto-pilot. Shower, clothes, satchel, wallet, phone, shoes, door, car- dogs. *Fuck* , his dogs. He spun on his heels, quickly letting the dogs outside to relieve them. As he waited, he began to fill their bowls up with food and water, now lingering by the door until all the dogs were done.

After settling his canines, he finally locked the door and got into his car for the *second* time that morning. Once he had driven out of his property, the second realisation had dawned on him; *he had forgotten to eat breakfast.*

God, he needed to get better at taking care of himself.

Still, the tension had made any prospect of eating shrivel and wither away. He didn't feel hungry, he had just felt sick to his stomach, and terribly, *terribly* anxious.

As he waited at a traffic light, he allowed his head to rest on the steering wheel; maybe he should contact the police about this.

And say what?
Hello, my name is Will Graham. I want to report a potential stalker. Proof? Oh, yeah, I wake up in the middle of the night and I swear I see people in the darkness. No, I do not have photographic evidence. No, I have never seen it up close, or really at all. It's just a gut feeling. Once I saw footprints in the snow. Were they animal prints? No. How do I know? I just do. Hello-? Hello-? Great, they hung up on me.

The sound of a car horn beeping made Will sit up suddenly; *fuck* , he needed to pay attention. He was *not* feeling perky this morning at *all* .

After giving an apologetic wave over his shoulder to the driver behind him, he focused on keeping his thoughts calm, and his attention on the road in front of him. If he wanted the children to still have a teacher by the end of the day, he needed to stop daydreaming and start sucking it up.

Worrying and dissociating was not going to get rid of his stalker- or, *potential* shadow figure stalker.

The more he considered it, the more he wondered if this was it; was he going insane for once and for all? Maybe the footprints were an animal. . . an animal who found out how to wear shoes-

Yeah, right . It was *definitely* a person. He needed to stop rationalising everything.

Once he had pulled up to the school parking area, he took a few moments to sit in the silence of his car and take deep breaths. Whatever anxieties were haunting him, he needed to leave them behind in his car. He couldn't go into a classroom of five and six year olds with the complexion of a man who was ready to down his sorrows in some whiskey.

Once he had calmed himself down, he scrubbed a hand over his face and stood out of the car. He could do this.

Slinging his satchel over his shoulder, he walked towards the front door of the school, and past the reception-

“Hey, Will-! C’mere-”

The voice had made Will come to a halt, and he took a few steps backwards to meet the receptionist.

“Hey, Geraldine. Sorry.” He smiled awkwardly, eyes resting on the receptionist’s grey cardigan.

“Don’t worry ‘bout it, sugar. I have a delivery for you. They brought it here n’ I didn’ know what to do with it.” The older woman turned to the side, now producing a bouquet of flowers.

Will felt his blood running cold, and he hesitantly took the bouquet into his hands, examining it; wild roses, honeysuckle, daisies, red carnations, roses, and tulips. All flowers of love and devotion.

“How sweet is that?” Geraldine swooned, giving him a knowing grin. “Got somebody special with their eye on you?”

“Uhm. . . sure. . . sorry- I’m just. . . taken aback. Could you tell me who delivered these?”

“Oh I didn’t really notice ‘em. They were here n’ gone in a flash. Put the flowers down, told me they were for ‘Will Graham’, then left.”

“Right. Okay. Thank you, Geraldine. I have to go to my class now.”

“Of course, Will. Do update me about this mysterious admirer-!” She called out after him.

As Will rushes to his classroom, he can feel his heart beating in his ears and in his throat- no, no, no, no, *no.*

He cannot panic now.

He takes steadying breaths, hurrying into his classroom and awkwardly shutting the door behind him with his hip. When he reaches his desk, he bites on his lip and forces himself to calm down. . . who could have sent these? Surely there was a reason-

A reason .

The flowers must have a message. Will approaches the bouquet and carefully moves the flowers around until he comes across a small card, no bigger than his palm. He reads.

‘I’m so sorry for making you cry, baby blue. It hurts me to see you so sad. You’re very pretty when you cry though.
Lots of love.
P.S. I am always watching :)’

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